

## HIO Case Study

### City of Ottawa: Equity and Inclusion Lens

#### Case Study at a Glance



To help support its Service Excellence objectives, the City of Ottawa is committed to providing quality services by establishing a qualified workforce that reflects the diverse population it serves. The City is working to eliminate barriers to employment, including those experienced by culturally diverse newcomers, and to promote equity and inclusion in all its workplace practices, policies and programs. Specific initiatives relating to the integration and retention of immigrants include:

- Equity and Inclusion Lens, an innovative and practical resource that enables all managers and staff to promote equity and inclusion in a systematic, consistent and coherent fashion.
- Use of Census data and internal surveys to identify gaps in employee/population representation.
- Hosting and attending coaching events for new immigrants.
- Providing diversity and inclusive workplace training for managers and employees.
- Connecting with community organizations serving immigrants.

#### ABOUT HIO CASE STUDIES

**Hire Immigrants Ottawa** is pleased to profile the innovative and best workplace practices of Ottawa-based businesses and organizations as they pertain to the recruitment, integration and retention of new immigrants within the workplace. The case studies describe the types of initiatives being undertaken by local employers, the motivations for introducing the initiatives and their impacts on individual, team, and workplace performance.

By sharing successful recruitment and integration practices more broadly within the management and human resource communities of Ottawa-based organizations, HIO seeks to inform and encourage other workplaces to undertake their own recruitment and integration efforts. The case studies are based on interviews held with company representatives who are actively engaged with the implementation of recruitment and integration initiatives in the Ottawa area.

## City of Ottawa: Equity and Inclusion Lens

The City of Ottawa is one of the region's largest employers, with more than 17,000 employees delivering literally hundreds of services in a broad range of areas such as transit, public health, recreation, and numerous others. In 2012 and 2013, the City of Ottawa was recognized as one of Canada's Top 100 employers and as one of Canada's best diversity employers. In 2010 they were recognized by Hire Immigrants Ottawa as an Employer of Excellence. As a public sector employer, the City of Ottawa views diversity, equity and inclusion as essential for the attainment of service excellence. To learn more about the City of Ottawa's initiatives as they relate to hiring and integrating new immigrants, Hire Immigrants Ottawa interviewed Bev Dewan, Manager, Resourcing and Talent Management, and Maria-Cristina Serje, Diversity Consultant, both with the City of Ottawa.

The City of Ottawa is represented on HIO's public sector working group and the Employer Council of Champions.

### A Strong Policy and Planning Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The City of Ottawa has formalized its commitment to equity and inclusion within an official Equity and Diversity [policy](#). The policy is broad and comprehensive. It covers all of the City's employees, and it recognizes that multiple diversities exist within the population, whether based on gender, ethno-cultural background, sexual orientation, or disability status. The policy is designed to eliminate systemic barriers to employment that face various diversity groups, and to promote the development of a work environment that promotes equity and inclusion in all aspects of the City's work. Its ultimate purpose is to contribute to the achievement of the City of Ottawa's business goals and client service delivery objectives. To support the attainment of these objectives, the Equity and Diversity policy also commits the City to develop corporate and departmental diversity and inclusion plans that are to be implemented, monitored and evaluated for progress.

For Bev Dewan, who joined the City in 2009, one of the first steps in developing diversity and inclusion plans is knowing and understanding the benchmark data: "If you look at the make-up of the employees at the City using the employment equity statistics based on a confidential self-identification questionnaire, and you compare that to Census data, you will see that in three of the four federally legislated equity groups - Aboriginals, visible minorities and persons with disabilities - we do not fully reflect the population we serve. While females have good representation overall, they are still under-represented in the non-traditional occupations. Our data do not allow us to comment on the degree of representation of immigrants per se, but nevertheless, we know that visible minorities are under-represented, and also that the majority of new immigrants coming to Ottawa are part of a visible minority."

But Dewan also points out that the degree of equity group representation varies from department to department within the City. She points to the example of Transit Services. "Because Transit Services is federally regulated, it falls under employment equity legislation, which requires an employment equity plan and the filing of an annual employment equity report. So they've had that plan in place for several years, and as a result of that plan, overall their staff is quite diverse, with the exception of women in non-traditional occupations such as the bus operator position. Visible minorities mirror the population in Ottawa-Gatineau.

### Understanding Barriers to Employment

According to Dewan, there could be some systematic barriers for immigrants seeking employment with the City. To start with is the sheer number of job applications received by the City - more than 80,000 per year - which means a great reliance on the use of resumes for initial candidate screening. "In the private sector", says Dewan, a former hi-tech employee, "it's quite common to have an employee referral program in which someone can be hired based on the recommendation of a current employee. At the City,

there is no referral program as all staffing should be done in an impartial and transparent manner. A referral program may create the perception that preference is being given to friends and family. Although it might be advantageous for us to create diversity through referrals, understandably, we can't do that".

"Another factor may be credential recognition", says Diversity Consultant Maria-Cristina Serje. "We know that a very high percentage of immigrants moving to Ottawa have post-secondary qualifications. So it's not necessarily a matter of *having* credentials...maybe it's a matter of credential recognition".

Serje is also quick to point out that it is important for the City to address issues relating to retention and promotion. "In Canada, immigrants too often end up in positions for which they are over-qualified. They may take entry level positions, because they have to put food on their table. We have to also make sure that there are no barriers preventing qualified people from taking appropriate-level jobs, and that opportunities for advancement apply to all".

Both Serje and Dewan agree that an essential component of the diversity and inclusion strategy is education and awareness."Even though our under-representation of diversity groups is unintentional, we need to create the intention to change," says Serje.

## The Equity and Inclusion Lens – A Practical Tool

The [Equity and Inclusion Lens](#) is an innovative and practical tool that enables all City employees and managers to promote equity and inclusion in a systematic, consistent, and coherent fashion. The Equity and Inclusion Lens was developed in partnership with the City for all Women Initiative, and involved an extensive consultative and participatory

process involving close to 150 people from the City, academic and community organizations, and the community at large. Through this consultative process, 11 groups were identified as being at risk of exclusion (women, visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, people living with disabilities - plus seniors, youth, francophone, rural residents, immigrants, people living in poverty, and GLBT). Members of these 11 communities were convened, and asked to write about the barriers they face, the contributions they make, and their vision of an inclusive City. As a result, a unique and valuable feature of the Equity and Inclusion Lens is that it is accompanied by [11 Diversity Snapshots](#), written in first person, by members of at risk groups.

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The snapshots serve as an effective education and awareness tool, and help City employees better understand and respond to the needs and aspirations of our increasingly diverse population. According to Serje, "The Equity and Inclusion Lens raises awareness about the multiple diversities in our community – with the idea to always remember

and remind ourselves that this is a diverse city. And when I say diverse, I don't only refer to cultural diversity or immigrants, but also other types of diversity, and we need to be aware of the need to engage and employ in a way that reflects the diversities of our population. We serve a diverse city."

The Equity and Inclusion Lens is designed to be a practical resource for City staff and management to use in all types of work situations, whether it's working with people, designing communications, developing policies, planning projects, or recruiting, interviewing and training. For each area of work, the Lens poses a series of questions to help users:

- Generate better solutions by incorporating a diversity of perspectives;

- Take positive steps to remove systematic barriers and promote inclusion;
- Create a more positive and respectful work environment;
- Achieve greater client satisfaction.

By applying the Equity and Inclusion lens in the development of strategies and frameworks, the setting of goals, and the evaluation of outcomes, the Lens supports the work of Council, management and staff, as well as the City’s business and community partners. It is central to supporting the City’s Service Excellence commitments and initiatives. From a Human Resources and Talent perspective, it will help City staff to recognize and engage the skills, experience and knowledge of all residents, and it helps to attract, promote and retain a talented workforce.

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According to Serje, “the idea is that all staff managers, councilors, everyone, we all use the tool so that we are always aware that our actions will potentially have an impact on the diverse population. Our goal is to increase the positive impact of inclusion, and minimize the negative impact of exclusion”.

### Putting it into Practice - Getting People on Board

After developing the Equity and Inclusion Lens, an essential task has been to raise awareness about it and to encourage its systematic use across the City’s many departments. “Some people may think they have no time for this, and others may feel they don’t need it” says Serje. “But we have accompanied the use of the Lens with very ‘hands-on’ experiences and learning opportunities, to demonstrate that it’s easy to use and will help people with their work.” Training on how to use the Equity and Inclusion Lens is currently being rolled out, and Bev Dewan has already seen a definite increase in people’s awareness of diversity and

inclusion and a growing capacity among staff to use the Lens to support their work.

In accordance with the Equity and Diversity Policy, the City has created a corporate diversity and inclusion plan, and all departments are now generating their own plans. Some departments are also creating diversity

champion programs, in which an individual or individuals within the department are taking the lead. Dewan points to the Ottawa Paramedic Service as an example: “They have been really active with several initiatives because

they have someone within that department who has taken the lead in getting people on board, and that practice is spreading because it’s seen as a best practice. We’re starting to see the other departments doing it, and it seems to be growing organically”.

### Creating a Workforce that Reflects the Diversity of the Community

The implementation of new policies and workplace practices is something that can take time, especially within large and complex organizations. While Dewan and Serje believe great progress has been made in promoting equity and inclusion, both suggest that there is still work to be done. One area that Dewan points to is the further development of reliable data and statistics, not only to monitor progress in employee representation, but to better understand and address the challenges and barriers facing under-represented groups such as immigrants.

Toward this end, the City has recently introduced a new e-recruitment system that allows job candidates the option of self-identifying as a member of a group at risk of exclusion for the purposes of recruitment. When fully operational, the system will allow the City to gain a better understanding of the population characteristics of people who apply for jobs with the City. According to Dewan, “the data from the recruitment questionnaire

will provide us with baseline information, because right now, we simply don't know how many people who are applying to the City are immigrants or visible minorities. It will be interesting to see how many people from diverse populations are actually applying, how many are actually getting through to the selection process and how many people are getting hired".

The City also periodically re-surveys City staff to ensure its self identification database is complete and accurate. According to Serje, "we want to ensure that we have an accurate snapshot of our workforce. The representation data is a good indicator to see if and how our numbers have changed, and where we may need to do further work. We know that some departments are more diverse than others, but we want to have an accurate picture".

Dewan advised that the staffing unit utilize the recruitment data to proactively support the hiring processes of the various departments in the City. The idea is to develop HR practices that simultaneously support the City's service excellence objectives and its equity and inclusion goals. Dewan explains: "To do this, the staffing group and HR consultants will need to understand the diversity plans of the various departments they support, and the departments themselves should understand what the data reveal about the diversity of their staff. So for example, if there is a top-notch qualified job candidate who has self-identified as an immigrant or one of the other diverse groups, and if we know the department is trying to increase its representation among these groups, then we will bring it to the hiring manager's attention and try to ensure that that candidate makes it to the interview stage."

Work is also underway to develop an evaluation system to formally measure the impact of the use of the Equity and Inclusion Lens. In the meantime, both Serje and Dewan are confident that the ongoing commitment of the City's leaders and the growing interest and involvement of City departments, and the increasing awareness of staff around diversity and inclusion

issues, the momentum needed to reach the City of Ottawa's Equity and Inclusion goals is very much in evidence.

## Working with Community Partners, Taking a Leadership Role

To further enhance equity and inclusion, both within its own workforce, as well as more broadly within the community, the City of Ottawa is actively involved with numerous community organizations and initiatives. In the case of immigrant newcomers, the City has been a long-time participant in the Hire Immigrants Ottawa initiative, serving on HIO's [Employer Council of Champions](#) and its [Public Sector Working Group](#). In partnership with HIO and the Ottawa Job Match Network, the City has hosted several public sector coaching events in which employers meet one-on-one with skilled immigrants to provide guidance resume preparation, job search skills and networking approaches.

The City of Ottawa is also a founding partner with the [Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership \(OLIP\)](#), and it continues to play a lead role in the implementation of the [Ottawa Immigration Strategy](#). The strategy was developed by OLIP partners to provide long-term community direction to improve immigrants' and newcomers' integration outcomes while enhancing Ottawa's prosperity and vitality.